



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Dominican Republic

#### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country occupies two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola and has an area of 18,815 square miles. Its population is estimated at 8.8 million.

The largest religious denomination is the Roman Catholic Church. Traditional Protestants, evangelical Christians (particularly Assemblies of God, Church of God, Baptists, and Pentecostals), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have a much smaller but generally growing presence. According to Demos 2004, a population survey taken in 2004 by the Center for Political and Social Studies of the Pontifical Catholic Mother and Teacher University and the Center for Social Studies and Demographics, the population was nominally 64.4 percent Roman Catholic and 11.4 percent Protestant (under which category the survey grouped evangelicals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and traditional Protestants). In the same study, 22.5 percent of the sample said they had no religion. Demos 2004 also reported that 55.1 percent of respondents considered themselves religiously observant, while 44.3 percent did not practice actively.

There are approximately 300 Jews in the country, 200 of whom are observant. Most Jews live in Santo Domingo, which has a synagogue and a community leader but no ordained rabbi. In Sosua, there is a synagogue for the small Jewish community, descended from the approximately 600 European Jewish refugees resettled in the country during the Second World War. The Government estimates that there are 5,000 Muslims in the country. There is an active Sunni mosque in Santo Domingo, with approximately 100 regular worshippers, and a small, informal Shi'a facility that is used on special occasions. Buddhism and Hinduism are practiced by a few adherents. Many Catholics practice a combination of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (santería) or witchcraft (brujería), but because these practices are usually concealed, the number of adherents is unknown.

Organized foreign missionary groups working in the country include Mormons, Mennonites, Episcopalians, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other missionaries are nondenominational or affiliated with independent churches.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. The Government signed a concordat in 1954 with the Vatican, extending to the Catholic Church special privileges not granted to other religious organizations. These include the use of public funds to underwrite some church expenses, such as rehabilitation of church facilities, and a complete waiver of customs duties when importing goods.

Religious groups are required to register with the Government to operate legally. Groups other than the Catholic Church must

request exonerations from customs duties from the Office of the Presidency. This process can be lengthy; however, no requests for tax exoneration were denied during the period covered by this report. Evangelical Protestant leaders have regularly urged the Government to provide their churches privileges equivalent to those granted to the Catholic Church. Roman Catholic weddings are the only religious marriage ceremonies that the Government recognizes, although civil unions are legal as well. At the end of the period covered by this report, Congress was considering but had not approved legislation to recognize marriages performed by non-Catholic denominations.

A 2000 law requires that the Bible be read in public schools, but it is not enforced. Private schools are not obliged to include Bible reading among their weekly activities.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

#### Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy met with leaders of various religious communities, including those of minority faiths.

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[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51636.htm)